

**American Public Opinion with Chinese Characteristics: Missionaries in the (China)  
Lobby, 1938-1941.**

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**Abstract**

While traditionally it has been accepted that the China Lobby began in the late 1940s, this paper will challenge that tradition; it will be argued that 1938 is the more important *primo instanti*. Two missionary-kid brothers Frank and Harry Price, begin this lobby because the Chinese Nationalist government secretly determines that only Americans, missionaries and journalists specifically, can tell China's story to an isolationist United States after the Japanese invasion of China in 1937.

This research utilizes documents that have been recently published and which have not previously been examined through this particular lens. Frank Price is a virtual unknown among both missiologists and diplomatists. Here I have combined both Chinese and English language sources from multiple archives, including recently declassified Chinese Nationalist records in Taiwan, autobiographies of Chinese officials, and missionary papers from various archives in the United States, including extensive research in the Frank W. Price papers held at the George C. Marshall Foundation in Lexington, Virginia. Research was also conducted in the American Committee for Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression collection at Harvard University. This sizeable collection was "lost" to Harvard librarians and had not been used since the late

1970s. Combining unused and underused collections, newly available government documents, and a virtual unknown figure to historians, this research brings new light to the missionary experience in China and its impact on Sino-U.S. relations.

It will be demonstrated that the Chinese government oversaw more than eighty lobby committees across the United States from 1938 until 1941. The public diplomacy gospel these missionaries, and the Chinese government, were spreading was one of internationalism rather than isolationism. This lobby, and the support it built for China in America throughout the 1940s is, inarguably, the cornerstone to understanding contemporary Sino-U.S. relations.

### **Keywords**

Public diplomacy, Sino-US Relations, Frank Price, Chiang Kai-shek, missionary, China

During the third week of May, 1938, several Americans met in a small apartment in New York City and developed a campaign which they hoped would change American foreign policy toward Japan, and which ultimately sought to draw America away from its political isolation by pushing Congress to place an embargo on Japan; the United States was Japan's chief supplier for scrap iron and steel and for petroleum. The campaign the men waged over the next two and a half years was, they claimed, independently initiated, organized, and financed. Evidence, however, suggests that their efforts were none of these things and that between 1938 and 1941 the Chinese government secretly

orchestrated a publicity campaign, which these men executed. This paper will explore the role in that campaign of two of these Americans, brothers Frank and Harry Price. Specifically, I will examine their relationship with the KMT and the US State Department in the context of a little-known China Lobby known as The American Committee for the Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression, or AC.

### *The KMT Blueprint for Public Diplomacy*

On February 11, 1938, three months before that meeting in the small NY apartment, Chiang Kai-shek approved a propaganda blueprint put forward by his Vice-Minister of Information, Hollington Tong (董显光). Tong proposed that the Chinese government employ foreigners, rather than Chinese, to carry out its propaganda campaign overseas. The United States was the primary target because that country was Japan's largest supplier of war material. The message Tong wanted to convey to the Americans was to "Lend China... moral and material support, and withhold [that support] from our enemy."<sup>1</sup> But the Chinese government understood that the American public was not psychologically prepared for war; in 1938 Americans feared any action that threatened to draw them closer to armed conflict.

Tong's directive outlined a ten-point propaganda blueprint, and was to remain top secret. Of these ten points, six focused on foreigners - missionaries and journalists - who, while operating inside of the United States, could carry out a Chinese publicity campaign within a cultural framework already familiar to most Americans; Americans

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<sup>1</sup> Tong 18

<sup>2</sup> Zeng Xubai, 199-201. For English translations, and interpretation, see the politics of nanjing minoru kitamura, p. 30-31. Also see Tong 21.

<sup>3</sup> Zeng Xubai, 199-201. For English translations, and interpretation, see the politics of nanjing minoru kitamura, p. 30-31. Also see Tong 21. Ezachi Michio, in his xxxx, uses the word "propaganda" instead of "publicity." The word "publicity" is probably a better translation.

<sup>4</sup> Published under a different title in the UK. What War Means: Japanese Terror in China... Or sth like this.

were accustomed to hearing furloughed missionaries speak in church, and likewise, as a matter of course turned to foreign correspondents for international news. In his ten-point proposal Tong specified only two foreigners by name.

The first of these was American photojournalist Earl Leaf. Leaf was the North China Manager of the United Press and was stationed in China to report on the Second Sino-Japanese War. Leaf accepted Tong's proposal and arrived in the United States a month later, in March. The second man was American missionary Francis Wilson Price. Price was born in China to missionary parents, had lived in China most of his life, and spoke the language fluently. Price was already in America at the time of Tong's proposal in February, having returned for a one-year furlough in August 1937.

Another journalist, Australian Harold J. Timperley, was recruited to join Leaf in New York. One member of Tong's ministry, and head of that department's China Information Committee, was Zeng Xubai (曾虛白). Years later Zeng recalled the need for secrecy surrounding the KMT's publicity in the United States. In reference to Timperley's employment, Zeng wrote, "it would have been absolutely no good for the Chinese to show their faces." During the few months before Timperley was sent to the United States, he and Zeng held what Zeng described as "secret conferences."<sup>2</sup> Sometime after April 1938, Timperley was sent to the US to work as the KMT's "secret man in charge of publicity."<sup>3</sup> It was at this time that Timperley published a book titled *The Japanese Terror in China*, which detailed the Japanese invasion of Nanjing.<sup>4</sup> "Timperley was an ideal choice," Zeng claimed, and his book "sold well... and achieved

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our propaganda aims."<sup>5</sup> Immediately after Timperley's arrival in the US, in addition to promoting his book, he and Leaf began to generate publicity through the KMT's New York office of the Trans Pacific News Service.

In May, just a month after Timperley began his work with the KMT, Harry Price, Frank's youngest brother, invited Earl Leaf to a meeting in which the subject was how to best generate positive publicity for China; five other men were present, three journalists representing IPR, *Amerasia*, and *The Moscow Daily News*, and two missionaries.<sup>6</sup>

*Leaf's* official affiliation with the AC at this time was through the United Press, as their North China Manager. While there is no solid evidence that Frank and Harry knew of Leaf's *actual* affiliation with the KMT at this early stage, it seems almost certain that they did; there are few other plausible explanations for Leaf and the Price brothers to have begun working together. In a 1967 interview Harry admits this as well, stating that the men who met in his apartment in May 1938 came from "diverse" backgrounds and may have otherwise never met were it not for this committee.<sup>7</sup> A few years later, in a 1974 monograph on the American Committee, Harry Price revealed to Donald Friedman that he initiated the first May meeting after reading two articles, one in *Harper's* and one in *Asia* magazine, both written by economist Eliot Janeway and which described the extent to which American companies supplied Japan's war material.

While this may be true, it may not be the complete picture. Frank met with Madame Chiang Kai Shek on May 27, 1937, the night before he returned to the United States on furlough, and on his final night aboard ship to the United States, he recorded in

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<sup>5</sup> Zeng Xubai, 199-201. For English translations, and interpretation, see *the politics of nanjing* minoru kitamura, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Friedman's book about the committee, the little yellow one, p. 1-4. Also see Park dissertation in my folder (WVU) p. 103. Bisson, Jaffe, and Stewart were accused of being communists by the McCarron Subcommittee in 195x.

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, p. 4

his diary that he stayed up all night writing an article. The piece Frank references was probably an article he had published in the *Washington Post* three weeks after landing in the United States, titled *A United China Confronts Japan*.<sup>8</sup> From this it is fairly clear that Price and the Chiangs had already discussed cooperating to help change American public opinion.

But Tong claims that Frank Price cabled him voluntarily from the United States almost a year later, and "without solicitation," offered to assist in China's publicity efforts.<sup>9</sup> This claim is suspicious, but no solid evidence was found which either convincingly supports or refutes Tong.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, whether Frank, Harry, Leaf, or perhaps even Tong provided the motive for this first meeting cannot be determined with certainty, but the ideas the men discussed in Harry's New York apartment in May 1938 bore fruit and by August their newly formed lobby, the American Committee for the Non-Participation in Japanese Aggression was printing its freshly written booklet *America's Share in Japan's War Guilt* by the tens of thousands.

American companies, the Price Committee informed Americans in this booklet, were providing Japan with over 90% of its scrap metals and 66% of its petroleum. These were being used to make bombs and to build, and fly, Japanese warplanes. Yet Roosevelt did not act, and the US Congress refused to introduce legislation that could end these shipments. The Price Committee's sole purpose was to convince the US government to place an embargo on Japan. This required a dual pronged approach of

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<sup>8</sup> Widener, AC, box, 11, fwp, oct 4.

<sup>9</sup> Tong 94. Note that there is a China Information Service and a China Information Committee, both of which Tong was involved. Frank was involved with the first of these and there is no evidence linking him to the latter group. However, considering the names, and that they were both under Tong, it is possible that these two groups were linked. However, this research did not search for such links, and neither did it uncover such links.

<sup>10</sup> and it is possible that in 1950, when Tong made these claims, a time when the KMT desperately needed American support, Tong did not wish to reveal the true nature of China's publicity campaign in the United States during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Such revelations, he may have imagined, could do irreparable damage to American public opinion at a time when that opinion was desperately needed.

both educating the American public and working directly with US government officials.

*The KMT, the State Department, and the Price Committee*

Immediately after the first May meeting in New York, Harry Price scheduled an appointment with State Department's China specialist, Stanley Hornbeck, who was at that time, special adviser to Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Harry briefed Hornbeck on the committee's goals and sought advice on how the committee could best navigate US politics and partisan differences.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, that same month, the United States Congress enacted the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). FARA required individuals acting on behalf of foreign governments and who were "employed by agencies to disseminate propaganda in the United States" to register as a foreign agent before July 8, 1938.<sup>12</sup> Both of the Price brothers, Earl Leaf, and Harold Timperley must have considered whether they should register as foreign agents.

Whether Hornbeck considered his relationship with the Price Committee in the context of FARA is not known, but in July Harry met Stanley Hornbeck again, and this time Earl Leaf and Helen Loomis joined the meeting. Hornbeck was already sympathetic to the goals of the Price Committee, but unlike that committee, who were chiefly concerned with China, Hornbeck's primary concern centered on the threat a strong Japanese military posed to Americans.<sup>13</sup> Hornbeck began to informally advise Harry Price, and he also periodically scheduled meetings with Price Committee Chairman, Roger S. Greene, himself both a former missionary and Foreign Service Officer.

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<sup>11</sup> Hornbeck had been the chief of the State Department's Division of Far Eastern Affairs until he became a special adviser to Secretary of State Cordell Hull in 1937. This meeting between Hornbeck and Price was in June.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fara.gov/> accessed on April 29, 2012. FARA wording, June 1938.

<sup>13</sup> Park dissertation, *Missionaries and the China Lobby*

By December Frank had returned to China and the American Committee was, at this point, largely under Harry's direction. Also by that time the American Committee had built up a powerful national board, most prominent among them was former, and future, Secretary of War Henry Stimson. Notably absent from the committee's board after December was Earl Leaf who had registered with the US government as a foreign agent. He had separated from the committee Harry later claimed, so that no one would reach the erroneous conclusion that the KMT was somehow guiding the committee.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, Harry seems to have been aware of the implications of his role in the Price Committee. In September Harry had written to former China missionary Helen Loomis, asking that she send him more information regarding the passage of FARA. "I wonder if you would be so good as to secure and send to me *at once* copies of any additional documents which accompanied the passage of [FARA]?"<sup>15</sup> Loomis was the editor of *The China Information Service*, a weekly periodical created and loosely managed from China, by Frank Price, but which was edited and mailed to American subscribers from Washington by Loomis. In her reply to Harry, Loomis notes that she had also provided Earl Leaf with copies of this material.<sup>16</sup> Neither Harry or Frank ever registered as foreign agents.

#### *Leaf and Timperley Vetting Committee Material*

In the early months of the Price Committee Leaf and Timperley kept regular contact with Frank and Harry Price. "I have been waiting to answer your and Leaf's

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<sup>14</sup> Donald Friedman, P. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Harvard, Widener, AC, Box 9, Loomis, box 1. In her box 2, she notes that she is sending it to him, and that she is sending other to Earl Leaf. Italics mine.

<sup>16</sup> Widener, Box 9, Loomis folder 2, September 28, 1938.

letter," and am "returning some letters which Earl [Leaf] loaned me to read. Many thanks," Frank wrote, "They are interesting and illuminating."<sup>17</sup> This mention of Leaf, in a letter from Frank to Harry, is typical of their correspondence. He also *met* with Leaf and Timperley during these early months, including on the eve of his departure for China in October 1938. Once aboard ship, Frank wrote to Loomis and it is here that the true nature of his cooperation with Leaf and Timperley becomes clear. Frank told Loomis that there were many missionaries on board the ship, some of whom had friends in Canada and England, and who wished to be placed on the mailing list for Loomis and Price's weekly newsletter. But in this regard, Frank instructs Loomis to verify with Timperley that AC publicity efforts were not "going over the head of plans already made for England or Canada," obviously referring to work orchestrated by the KMT.<sup>18</sup>

### *Finance*

Although it is clear that the KMT and the Price brothers cooperated with regards to the American Committee, the *nature* of that relationship is difficult to define with clarity. Hollington Tong has claimed that there was little or no connection, and the English sources which do reveal the relationship appear to be primarily correspondence between Frank and Harry Price, and a few other individuals with whom they were communicating. A few historians have sought to define the relationship by uncovering financial records, but even these have not provided conclusive evidence. The Price Committee's own financial records, while recording total revenue between 1938 and 1941 of nearly \$140,000, do not include an itemized list of donors, some of which, such

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<sup>17</sup> Harvard, Widener, AC papers, Box 11, FWP file. July 21, 1938.

<sup>18</sup> Widener, AC, Box 11, FWP, NOVember 9, 1938.

records would reveal, were Chinese.<sup>19</sup>

Initially Harry Price accepted money from Chinese sources but, on the advice of his committee chairman, Roger Greene, he returned the money and ostensibly did not accept any further donations from Chinese donors. However, Japanese historian Tsuchida Akio has claimed that there was "ardent" cooperation between China's Consul-General in the Los Angeles, Zhang Zichang, and the Los Angeles chapter of the American Committee.<sup>20</sup>

Chinese language sources at the KMT archives in Taipei confirm this "ardent" effort, and reveal that the Chinese had a direct hand, not only in the funding of, but in the *creation* of (at least) the LA chapter of the Price Committee, but with an American officially appearing as chairman. The LA group was one of eighty local Price Committee chapters. In March 1940, the Chinese Consul-General in Los Angeles reported to Chongqing regarding this local Price Committee, that "significant expenditures" had been made in order to "operate this committee," and that "economically, it was very hard to maintain... We prepared to organize this committee for quite a long time and the organization officially came into existence last November."<sup>21</sup>

The LA Consul-General's report to Chongqing outlines the propaganda methods employed with the American Committee's Los Angeles chapter and leave no doubt about the Chinese government's intentions. According to the aforementioned report, the

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<sup>19</sup> Friedman, p. 25. See also AC papers, Statement of Income and Expenses to March 23, 1942.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, including English secondary sources which briefly touch on this issue, see: Sun Youli, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931-1941*. New York, St. Martin's Press: 1993. P. 138-139. See also, Craft's "Peacemakers in China: American Missionaries and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941." *Journal of Church and State*, Summer, 1999. P. 586. See Chiow, p. 242. See also Warren I. Cohen. *The Chinese connection: Roger S. Greene, Thomas W. Lamont, George E. Sokolsky and American-East Asian relations*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1978. P. 214. Also see Park's article on sino-japan war. P. 398 (in a journal). Also see Friedman's *Road from Isolation*, p. 8-9. And Warren I. Cohen's *Private Groups*. P. 436..... ALSO SEE Tsuchida paper... P. 50

<sup>21</sup> *Academica Historica*, File No: 020-050202-0009-0013a.

expenditure required for the LA chapter of the American Committee was \$400 each month, most of which General Consul Zhang appears to have been willing to provide, if he could raise the money privately. Funding for this LA committee was subsequently raised through "secret" donations from "unknown" persons, many of whom were Chinese, but some of whom were American.

The next month, April, Chongqing received another report from the Los Angeles Consul General. This report claimed that \$10,000 was secretly raised from Chinese and non-Chinese friends of China.<sup>22</sup> This money was used exclusively for American Committee purposes, and in all cases was to be carried out in a "discreet" manner."<sup>23</sup> Consul General Zhang had received instructions from his Foreign Ministry in Chongqing "to proceed with prudence and secrecy and to seize opportunities" to provide financial support to the Price Committee when possible.<sup>24</sup>

But Zhang was not alone. Chinese Ambassador Hu Shi (胡適) was also assisting the Price Committee.<sup>25</sup> KMT records indicate that Hu himself had received \$20,000 directly from Chongqing, which he later reported had been spent in support of the China Economic Research Institute and the Price Committee.<sup>26</sup> Despite this support from the Chinese government, the Price Committee appears to have been given only as much as it needed to survive and Chinese government funding does not appear to have been a stable source of income. Nor is it clear how much, if any, of this funding

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<sup>22</sup> Academica Historica, File No.: 020-050202-0009-0020a

<sup>23</sup> Academica Historica, File No: 020-050202-0009-0013a.

<sup>24</sup> Loomis to H. B. Price, 3 Aug. 1939; Frank T. F. Young to H. Price, n.d., AC Papers. Tsuchida page 51....

<sup>25</sup> Hu was China's ambassador to the US from 1938 to 1942.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Price is the only American who, in this research, has been discovered to call the Price Committee the "Stimson Committee." All others either refer to it as the Price Committee or by its proper name. Interestingly, the use of the name "Stimson Committee" for the ACNPIA only appears in this document, and in Frank Price's letters back to America after he arrived back in China, in 1939.... **Did the Chinese government refer to this committee as the Stimson Committee?** Reference to the committee as the Stimson Committee in official Chinese documents, and by Frank Price, but not by others in the United States, suggests the possibility of close cooperation between Frank and Chongqing simply because of a shared vocabulary when referencing the committee.

reached the Price Committee's Washington office, from where Harry now managed the committee, and which correspondence indicates never had surplus revenue.<sup>27</sup>

So *unsteady* was that revenue, in fact, that Greene had written to Harry in January 1940, reminding him of the dire financial situation, and wanted to know what plans were in place if funding ran out, implying that staff cuts may be necessary. Harry replied that he did not "wish to evade the realities of the situation. Certainly they must be faced, and faced promptly...", but requested of Greene a few more months to see what financial bounty the latest mailings would yield.<sup>28</sup> The tenor of Greene's concern, suggests that he may not have been aware that the Chinese were still involved in financing the committee.

Ultimately, enough money was raised to pay committee debts, but not enough money was raised to continue the campaign's full slate of activities and in July the Price Committee's full-time staff were reduced from nineteen to three.<sup>29</sup> Nor did the AC need continue; on July 2, 1940, Congress passed the National Defense Act, enacting an embargo on scrap metals and petroleum. This Act was a major step forward in accomplishing the KMT's goal of soliciting material and financial support from the United States and removing that support from Japan.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, I am proposing that Frank and Harry Price, and their AC in the 1930s – the missionary influence – is actually the genesis of the China Lobby, which has

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<sup>27</sup> Research into Chinese sources in Nanjing and Taipei may reveal more information on this particular issue.

<sup>28</sup> Widener, AC papers, Box 6, Untitled Folder, January 30 RSG to HBP, and February 1, HBP to RSG.

<sup>29</sup> Friedman, p. 80. It is possible that these cuts may also have been related to the passage of the National Defense Act, also in July, and which went a long way to realizing the committee's goals. However, Friedman documents heated disagreements within the committee in October, 1940, about the committee's future. Yet it seems likely that the committee would not have made such drastic cuts so quickly only two days after the passage of the NDA (on July 2 and 4, 1938). Probably the cuts were planned because of financial difficulties.

generally been identified as having begun during the late 1940s. And significantly, that this lobby was managed by a foreign government. Thus not only did missionaries light the KMT's chosen path of Sino-US relations during the 1930s and 1940s, these missionaries also defined where that relationship would stand in 2016, three quarters of a century later. Frank Price's role, with that of thousands of others like him, also suggests that missionaries – the scratches they made on the minds of American pew-sitters, churchmen and women from the San Juan Islands to the Florida Keys – baptized their compatriots in the gospel of internationalism *and* support for China. This political baptism was a conversion stronger than their commissioned role as spiritual baptizers and gospel messengers.